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REMARKS

OF

Albert
HON. A. G. TALBOTT, OF KENTUCKY,
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ON THE

ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

251
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ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE.

While the Clerk was calling the roll on the ninety-ninth ballot for Speaker,

Mr. TALBOTT (when his name was called) said: If the House will indulge me for a few minutes, I desire to make a personal explanation. I hold in my hand the New York Courier and Enquirer, in which I find the following paragraph, contained in a letter from a Washington correspondent of that paper, dated December 27, and signed "Inspector." The paragraph to which I desire to call the attention of the House reads as follows:

"Mr. BOGOCCK, of Virginia, Mr. TALBOTT, of Kentucky, and other decided friends of Mr. RICHARDSON, have been absent to-day, and it is thought they are willing to allow Mr. BANKS to be elected, if he can be by the mere reduction of Mr. RICHARDSON's minority vote."

Sir, this paragraph attributes to me a willingness to see done in this House that which I have studiously and zealously endeavored to prevent since we commenced the first ballot for Speaker. It imputes to me motives unknown to my head or heart, all of which I spurn with the unknown author. It is true I was absent a few days from this Hall while the ballot for Speaker was being taken, about the time the article just read purports to have been written; but, I was not absent for pleasure or for profit, but in the faithful discharge of what I conceive to be a high, imperative, indispensable duty. I was in the sick chamber, and by the bed-side of a beloved wife, who has been confined to her room for the last three months, ministering to her wants and endeavoring to alleviate her pains. Most unexpectedly to me, sir, on the 24th day of December last, I received a communication from an affec-

tionate and devoted daughter, informing me that her mother desired my immediate presence, that she had been suddenly and violently attacked with a disease which, if not at once relieved, threatened a speedy dissolution. I did not, sir, hesitate for a moment to adopt the course which duty and affection dictated. I left this city for my home in Kentucky in less than one hour from the time I cast my sixty-ninth vote, I think, for the distinguished gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. RICHARDSON.] I traveled some two thousand miles in the performance of what, under the circumstances, I conceived to be my imperative duty.

Sir, if I had not adopted the course I did, if I had refused to obey such a summons, made under such peculiar circumstances, I would to-day, in my judgment, have justly merited the undivided scorn and contempt of every member upon this floor, and have proven myself unworthy the generous and magnanimous constituency which I have the honor to represent.

If the paragraph to which I have alluded had been published in my own State, amongst my own people, those who know me and the motives and principles which prompt and control my action, I would not have troubled myself to notice it. They know me, and I would have left the matter with them without comment or explanation; but, sir, I am for the first time a member upon this floor—a stranger to almost all the members present; and although I have always believed that any and every article, emanating from a driveling scribbler who loafs about the halls of legislation with a view to impugn the motives and villify the course of gentlemen, is too far beneath

contempt to be noticed; yet, sir, being a stranger, I have thought it due to the House, to my constituents, and to myself, to present the facts and make the explanation I have.

I have nothing to say in regard to the honorable gentlemen whose names are connected with my own in the paragraph I have read. They are present, and can speak for themselves. I have no doubt, however, they were actuated by the same honorable motives which I claim for myself.

Mr. Clerk, I have uniformly cast my vote at every ballot which has been taken for Speaker in this House (except when I was absent in Kentucky) for the honorable gentleman from the State of Illinois, [Mr. RICHARDSON;] and before I take my seat I desire to state, very briefly however, why it is that I have heretofore, and I expect hereafter to continue to vote for that gentleman until, in my judgment, the interest of the country, or my own convictions of propriety and policy, shall require a different vote. I desire to state, too, sir, before I take my seat, why it is that it is utterly impossible for me, either directly or indirectly, by my vote or otherwise, to aid in the election either of the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. BANKS,] who belongs to the Free-Soil Republican party, or the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. FULLER,] who belongs to the American, or the Know Nothing party.

Sir, I was elected to a seat in this House as an Independent Whig, pledged to no party as such, but to all parties and to the country upon the following platform of principles:

First, That I would stand by the Constitution of the United States and the American Union as they now are, in spirit and in letter, against all innovation or infraction, come from what quarter it may.

Second, That no religious test should ever be required of a citizen for any office or place of trust under the United States, whether he be native-born or naturalized, Protestant or Roman Catholic.

Third, That, except for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency, every office in the Government, State or National, should be equally accessible to every citizen, whether native-born or naturalized; that neither the place of birth, religious faith, sectional locality, nor worldly pursuit—nothing but citizenship, character, qualification, fidelity to our common country and political creed, should ever be required as a prerequisite for any office or place of trust under our republican Government.

Fourth, That, except as fugitives, the power to legislate upon the subject of slavery as property is not conferred upon Congress by the Constitution; nor is such a power necessary to the

exercise of any other power given. In order, therefore, to do justice to every citizen in every State in the Union, free and slave States, and to secure peace and harmony between the different sections of the Confederacy, and to the people of Kansas and Nebraska the proud privilege, when they come to organize themselves into States, and form their organic laws, of regulating for themselves their own domestic institutions, I will resist every effort to repeal the bill passed by the Thirty-Third Congress, known as the Kansas-Nebraska act, and any and every effort to restore the Missouri restriction line.

Fifth, For strictly enforcing that clause in the Constitution of the United States which provides, that no person held to service in one State under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up, on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due; and resistance to any modification or a repeal of the existing fugitive slave law, by which property in slaves might be rendered less secure, or fugitives more difficult to recover.

Sixth, Opposition to all secret, oath-bound political organizations, whenever, wherever, or for whatsoever, formed in our Republic, as impolitic, improper, and anti-American.

Seventh, In the administration of the Government and execution of the laws, we should know no North, no South, no East, no West; that all the rights of every citizen in every section of this great Confederacy should be as equally protected by law as they are secured by the Constitution.

This, sir, is the position I assumed in the late canvass for a seat upon this floor; this is the platform upon which I was elected and to which I stand pledged to all parties in my district and to the country. I will not now, sir, attempt to elaborate or to justify them; I will state, however, that by the indulgence of the House I may take occasion to discuss them at length at some future period. I will only add that, understanding the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. BANKS] as being the *great leader* of the *Free-Soil Know Nothing sectional Republican party*, advocating doctrines which, in my judgment, are inimical to civil and religious liberty, and sustaining and endeavoring to carry out a set of anti-slavery and Free-Soil principles, which, if triumphant, would not only prove highly detrimental to the best interest of the State which I have the honor in part to represent, but which, if pressed to the extreme to which I understand that gentleman is willing to go, would render doubtful, at least, the permanency and perpetuity of this glorious Con-

federacy. Entertaining this view, Mr. Clerk, of that gentleman's position, there is at once a gulf deep, wide, impassable, between him and myself. I could not therefore, sir, vote, or aid in any manner, directly or indirectly, to elevate him to the speakership of this House, without proving recreant to all the high trusts which have been confided to me by my constituents.

How is it, sir, with the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. FULLER?] While he is practically a little less anti-slavery, yet in theory, I presume, from his own definition of his position, he is pretty much the same, and in Americanism or Know Nothingism he is greatly ahead of the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. BANKS;] holding doctrines and advocating a system of policy, under the head of Know Nothingism, which I think not only violative of the Constitution of my country, but if carried out, subversive of civil and religious liberty. Sir, Know Nothingism, as I understand it, is a monstrous political heresy. It means no foreign-born citizen, it matters not how great or how good, no Roman Catholic, however patriotic he may be, shall have any office in the gift of the American people, from the fourth sergeant in a militia company up to the presidency of the United States. This is what I understand to be the doctrines held and propagated by that party. This, I know, was the doctrine preached and propagated by them in the district which I have the honor to represent, during the canvass the past summer. Yet, sir, they talk about civil and religious liberty. They say they do not proscribe Catholics. What is civil and religious liberty without civil and religious equality? What is civil and political liberty without civil and political equality? Freedom is but a name, and liberty a curse, whether civil, political, or religious, when fettered with political disability. Surely, sir, it is a monstrous political heresy to be taught in the land of Washington and Jefferson, that an entire class of our citizens, no matter how great or how good, are to be ostracised and proscribed because they were accidentally born in the wrong place, and another class ostracised because they happen to belong to the wrong church. Sir, the glory of our Government is its religious toleration; the glory of our Constitution, its equality of rights.

I will not enlarge. This, to me, is a doctrine monstrous and heretical. Sooner would I suffer my right arm to wither, or my tongue to cleave to the roof of my mouth, than I would indorse that doctrine, or aid in the triumph of a party which holds political opinions so adverse to my judgment, so revolting to my feelings, and which

would, either directly or indirectly, proscribe a man for his religious faith. I could not do it without proving a traitor to the men and the principles that placed me in my present position. I cannot, sir—I will not do it. I voted for the distinguished gentleman from Illinois sixty-nine times, I think, before I left for Kentucky, as I have before said, and I know I have voted for him on every ballot since my return. I now vote for him, and I expect to continue to vote for him, until, as I said before, the interest of my country, or my own views of propriety, or my sense of duty, shall require me to vote for another.

Mr. Clerk, what was the aspect of political parties when we first met at this Capitol? The Republican party had met in the North and organized themselves into a sectional Free-Soil Abolition party, determined, many of them, upon a repeal of the fugitive slave law, and all of them upon the repeal of the Kansas-Nebraska bill; the restoration of the Missouri restrictive line; the restriction of slavery in the Territories; the non-admission of any more slave States into this Union. This party, Mr. Clerk, promised no good to the country, but, by its system of political warfare, threatened a disruption of the Union. What else, sir? The great American party, which had boasted so long and so loud about the nationality of its principles, and the glorious results which would accrue to the country from the triumph of its principles—they, sir, a few days before we met here, held a meeting at Cincinnati, nine States being represented, and they, too, adopted a platform, threatening the institutions of the South, though it might cost this glorious Union to carry out their principles. What next? A few days before we met here, the great American party South, seeing that, by the action of their brethren at Cincinnati, the last hope of Americanism was gone in the South unless they in some way or other should meet and caulk their already leaky and fast sinking ship—they, too, had a meeting at the city of Louisville, in my own State; and what did they do? They repudiated the action of their party at Cincinnati by reindorsing the twelfth section of the Philadelphia platform, thus dividing and denationalizing and completely sectionalizing the great American party, swearing that there was, at least, a Spartan band of Americans at Louisville, Kentucky, who, though they had bowed the knee to SAM, would never do the like to SAMBO. And I believe in my heart they are in good earnest. In my judgment, if there is ever any more bending of the knees between them, SAMBO will have to be the first to bow.

But what, Mr. Clerk, was the peculiar political aspect of the country after this action of the American party at Louisville and Cincinnati? The old Whig party was dead. The great American party, which had promised so much to the country, stood thus irreconcilably divided and inefficient for good. The people at once saw that there was no party left but the old Democratic party, with her banner unfurled to the breeze as a national party. All eyes were at once turned to that party as the only hope of saving the Constitution and the Union against the aggressive policy of the Republican party of the North. The great problem yet to be solved, however, was, whether the old Democratic party, although she had never yet failed to save the country under any and all circumstances, might not, too, split upon this great denationalizing element—the slavery question—when she came to meet in a national caucus or convention to make a platform. This, sir, was the true condition of parties in this country when this Congress first met, and that the great question to be settled. Sir, we did meet in caucus in this Hall on the night of the 1st day of December last for the purpose of solving and settling that vexed question. I confess it was not, though my

faith was strong, without some trepidation that I entered this Hall on that memorable evening. I had some slight fears as to what might be the result; but, sir, to the honor and glory of the Democratic members of this House be it said, from every section of the Confederacy, at the very first effort at an organization and the adoption of a platform, we not only adopted by a unanimous vote our conservative platform and planted ourselves upon the Constitution and the Union, but we nominated for Speaker, upon that platform, by a similar vote, our present distinguished standard-bearer, the gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. Richardson,] from a free State; presenting to this House and to the country a man having a head and a heart capacious enough to defend and maintain the Constitution of the country and this glorious Confederacy of States as they are. Thus organized, Mr. Clerk, the old Democratic party stands to-day firmer, more united, and more impregnable than she ever did. She stands to-day, as I trust she ever will, as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, pointing to the Constitution and the Union as the only ark of our political safety. I vote, sir, for WILLIAM A. RICHARDSON.

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